

Democracy Promotion and the Normative Power Europe Framework, edited by Marek Neuman, Cham, Springer, 2019, x + 201 pp., £71.5 (hardback), ISBN 3-319-92689-6.

The EU's democracy promotion activities have been increasingly challenged in the past decade, by both internal and external factors. The rise of illiberalism in some EU member states, especially Hungary and Poland, have eroded the EU's pro-democracy credentials, and Russia's successful externalisation of its own illiberal governance to countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia means that the EU needs to work with local elites who face conflicting incentives. Systematically taking stock of what the EU has managed to achieve in this increasingly uphill struggle is the key value which this book brings to the debate, and at a very opportune moment.

The book uses the Ian Manners' Normative Power Europe (NPE) approach as its analytical framework, and asks the overarching question of whether this approach can help foster a better understanding of the EU's democracy promotion policies, and in turn, what lessons does democracy promotion hold for the NPE concept. Perhaps surprisingly, the NPE approach has only seen sporadic usage in making sense of democracy promotion policies, and the book therefore clearly breaks new ground. In fact, a strength of the volume is the efforts the editor and the various contributors have made in order to (re)problematize the NPE framework, and develop strong conceptual linkages between it and the EU's democracy promotion efforts. The chapter by Ron Holzhaecker and Marek Neuman for example makes an important conceptual contribution by providing an analysis of how the various democracy promotion tools of the EU, such as direct programmes (including funding and election observation missions) and political pressure through coordination with member states and other international actors, link to the norm diffusion mechanisms identified by Manners. This provides a concise, yet powerful analytical framework. A further useful conceptual contribution comes from the chapter by Marek Neuman, which investigates the role of member states in EU democracy promotion, and provides a framework for understanding the heterogeneity of member state views and positions, which are often masked in the literature's predominant focus on the EU as a whole.

The empirical chapters of the book provide accounts of how the NPE framework can explain the success or failure of EU democracy promotion in South East Europe, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. While some readers may miss analysis of North Africa and the Middle East, or perhaps regions even further away from the EU, the book is actually made coherent by its focus on countries which were members of the Soviet bloc.

The empirical chapters confirm some well-known findings from the previous literature on EU democracy promotion: the EU is more successful in democratizing its neighbours (and especially ones with a prospect of membership) than countries further afield; there is a persistent gap between the EU's often idealist, pro-democracy rhetoric and its practice, which is hindered by a number of competing objectives, such as the need for stability or a desire to develop economic relations. However, a number of new findings also emerge, for example relating to the heterogeneity of the EU, both in terms of institutions and members. The chapters also underline the value of the NPE framework, mainly in terms of Manners' concept of the 'cultural filter', which refers to 'all the domestic factors that can mitigate or augment the EU's push for greater democratization' (194). The value added from some of the empirical chapters clearly comes from their meticulous attempts to identify exactly which elements of this broadly defined cultural filter have been the most crucial promoters or inhibitors of the EU's efforts at

democratization: Anna-Sophie Maas' chapter on Armenia and Georgia for example underlines how domestic factors like security and energy concerns, as well as links to Russia, have limited the normative power of the EU (113). The chapter focusing on the Central Asian countries by Joachim Ahrens and Herman Hoen identifies on how some of these rentier states have been able to create 'semi-content' societies, despite political oppression, which again filters EU democratization pressures.

It is worth briefly reflecting on how the findings of the book enrich the NPE literature. In their concluding chapter, Marek Neuman and Senka Neuman Stanivukovic identify a key shortcoming of NPE: norms change, and are shaped (and contested) by a vast network of different actors, both inside and outside of the EU. NPE scholars need to unpack these dynamics and complexities, which would significantly increase the analytical purchase of the NPE framework.

The book is surprisingly coherent for an edited volume. It is carefully edited, and the individual chapters position themselves very clearly in relation to the book's broad theoretical framework. The concluding chapter rounds off the volume nicely, and hammers the main messages home. The link between NPE and democracy promotion has proven to be fruitful, and further research may consider using this analytical approach to make sense of EU democracy promotion in other regions as well. While using NPE as a framework to explain EU democracy promotion will mainly be of interest to academic readers, there is plenty of relevant insight in this volume for policy practitioners as well, especially in the empirical chapters.

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